

The Thirties

its laws and dossiers and revenue and easily
suppressed insurrec-
tion; where there was marriage and giving in
marriage, and
where evil-doers and adulterers were punished,
and the faithful
rewarded. As many little rivulets empty
themselves into a wide
lake, all their motion lost in its still expanse of
water, so did
every bubbling trend and fashion empty
themselves into the
B.B.C.

Circumstances shaped it, making it an image,
pure and unde-
filed, of the times. It was a mirror held up to
nature. Beards
grew on chins, tufty, rather sparse, as inevitably
as reeds in
marshland; sentiments crystallised with the same
slow certainty
that a pearl forms in an oyster. Whatever was put
into it must
either take on its texture or be expelled, a waste
product; though
different meats were inserted, the resultant
sausages were indis-
tinguishable. Nightly, the nine million listened
—'News-bulletin,
copyright reserved'—merely curious, or
apprehensive; gently
and persuasively instructed in their own and
others' misfortunes,
in what they should hope for and what they should
dread; music
to delight them, both serious and frivolous,
edifying discourses,
perhaps a domestic chat from Lord Elton, or a
curious encounter
between a Chinese poet and a Westmorland
shepherd; prayers
for the prayerful, tunes for the tuneless, instruction
for those who
wished to be instructed. Comfortable in arm-
chairs, drowsing
perhaps, snug and secure, the whole world was
available, its
tumult compressed into a radio set's small
compass. Wars and
rumours of wars, all the misery and passion of a

troubled world,
 thus came into their consciousness, in winter with
 curtains drawn
 and a cheerful fire blazing; in summer often out
 of doors,
 sprawling on a lawn or under a tree, or in a motor-
 car, indolently
 listening while telegraph poles flitted past.³²
 Dollfuss had been

⁸² In the United States, the broadcasting of one of Mr.
 Wells's romances,
The War of the Worlds, led to a panic among listeners, who
 thought that
 Martian invaders had made their appearance. What they
 heard on the
 wireless was so little related to their own experience, to
 reality, that an
 invasion from Mars seemed as possible or impossible as
 other news items
 announced, If Job had heard of his misfortunes from a
 B.B.C. announcer,